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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/07/2018
TAGS: ASEC KWBG PREL PTER IS
SUBJECT: EXPERTS CONSIDER AL-QAIDA IN ISRAEL ASPIRATIONAL,
NOT OPERATIONAL

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR PETER VROOMAN FOR REASON: 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶11. (U) Summary: In July, the Israel Security Agency (ISA) announced the arrest of two separate groups with links to Al-Qaida, marking the first time any citizen of Israel has been accused of affiliation with the terrorist organization. On 23 July, members of the security cabinet met in closed session to discuss Al-Qaida's threat to Israel. During a symposium on Al-Qaida at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), also on 23 July, experts said that Al-Qaida is trying to penetrate Israel, but is not yet operational. One expert posited that because every country on Israel's border is currently fighting Al-Qaida for its own reasons, they are inadvertently defending Israel. End Summary.

¶12. (U) On 9 July, ISA announced the indictment of two Bedouin residents of Rahat, Taher and Omar Abu Sukat. According to the announcement, Taher provided information to Al-Qaida about the location of strategic targets in Israel, including IDF bases and Ben Gurion Airport. According to ISA, Omar was extensively involved in closed Al-Qaida internet forums, including developing and distributing online training and promotional material. Both Taher and Omar are registered members of the Islamic Movement. In a separate incident, ISA and the police arrested six Arab youth, two of them Israeli citizens, for starting a terror cell which hoped to get Al-Qaida assistance to attack the helicopter of President Bush during his spring visit.

¶13. (U) Experts are concerned that Al-Qaida might gain strength in Gaza. Dr. Daniel Byman, visiting from Georgetown University, stated at the July 23 symposium that Al-Qaida's future in Gaza will be determined by Hamas. If Hamas tries to negotiate with Israel, Dr. Byman believes that Al-Qaida will attempt to gain strength in Gaza and try to spoil any agreement.

¶14. (U) Dr. Byman's belief that Gaza will be central to Al-Qaida's strategy in Israel is shared by members of the Israeli government and academia. Dr. Shaul Shai, Deputy Head of the National Security Council, stated at the symposium that if Al-Qaida operates from Gaza, it would not look much different from Hamas and, thus, it would not affect Israel's intelligence strategy.

¶15. (C) Amos Gilad, Political/Military Director for the Ministry of Defense told a visiting American delegation that Al-Qaida is trying to gain a foothold in Gaza. He stated that Tony Blair cancelled his trip into Gaza due to the Israeli assessment of an Al-Qaida threat. Gilad noted that Hamas is arresting terrorists. In fact, Gilad argued that Hamas has been much more successful than the Palestinian Authority in combating terrorism and at containing the other terror groups under the ceasefire. He cited the example of one powerful family in Gaza that was looking to form an Al-Qaida cell. Hamas reportedly told the family that if they continued their pursuit, they would "cease to exist." That family is no longer pursuing ties to Al-Qaida, according to Gilad.

¶ 6. (U) Yoram Schweitzer, Director of the Program on Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict for INSS, believes that Al-Qaida is looking for an opportunity to attack in Israel. However, he believes that Israel's best defense against Al-Qaida lies in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Hamas-controlled Gaza. Each is fighting against Al-Qaida for its own reasons, and, in doing so, is helping to prevent Al-Qaida from establishing itself in Israel.

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